REMARKS

The foregoing amendments and these remarks are in response to the Final Office Action dated February 28, 2011. Applicant requests a three month extension of time, and authorization is given to charge the appropriate fees to Deposit Account No. 50-0951.

At the time of the Office Action, claims 1-5 were pending in the application. Claims 1-5 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a). The objections and rejections are discussed in more detail below.

I. Rejections based upon Art

Claims 1-5 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over PCT Publication No. WO02/074427 to Bedetti ("Bedetti") in view of U.S. Patent No. 4,426,936 to Kuo ("Kuo"). Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration of this rejection.

According to present claim 1, the granulation process comprises the step of continuously dividing the fluidification air flow throughout the bed into a plurality of fractions having respective flow rates so that the flow rate of the fluidification air flow varies continuously between a minimum value flow rate, sufficient to support the fluid bed, fed at a first zone thereof, and a maximum value flow rate; fed in another zone of the same bed, so as to induce and maintain the substantially vortex-shaped circulatory movement of the granules. Support for the amendment can for instance be found in Fig, 3, 3a, 4 and 7 and the corresponding description.

This particular continuous division of the fluidification air flow is neither disclosed nor suggested in Kuo. Indeed, in Kuo the holes 34 are drilled through plate 30 so as to obtain two distinct zones in the plate 30 having different hole density: a higher hole density near the center 43 of the plate 30 and a lower hole density near the flange 45. This separation between two distinct zones of the plate 30 having two corresponding different density of the holes 34 is clearly visible in figure 3. It is thus clear that in Kuo the fluidification air flow is merely divided in two fractions corresponding to the two zones having different holes density. The claimed feature of providing a continuous division into fractions of the fluidification air flow, so that the flow rate of the fluidification air flow varies continuously throughout the bed is thus fully missing from Kuo.

Therefore, even supposing that a person of ordinary skill in the art combined the perforated base taught in Kuo with the granulator of Bedetti, they would not have obtained the bed recited in claim 1, the latter being only possible with the exercise of an inventive skill,

The bed defined in the present claims should thus be regarded as a substantial improvement over Kuo, since the provision of such continuous division of the fluidification air flow into fractions having different flow rates varying continuously throughout the bed from a minimum value to a maximum value drastically facilitate the induction and maintenance of the substantially vortex-shaped circulatory movement of the granules with respect to the prior art.

For the foregoing reasons, claim 1 is believed to relate to patentable subject matter, and to be in condition for allowance. The dependent claims are believed allowable because of their dependence upon an allowable base claim, and because of the further features recited.

II. Conclusion

Applicant has made every effort to present claims which distinguish over the prior art, and it is thus believed that all claims are in condition for allowance. Nevertheless, Applicant invites the Examiner to call the undersigned if it is believed that a telephonic interview would expedite the prosecution of the application to an allowance. In view of the foregoing remarks, Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration and prompt allowance of the pending claims.

Respectfully submitted,

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Mark D. Passler
Registration No. 40,764
Sarah E. Smith
Registration No. 50,488
AKERMAN SENTERFITT
Post Office Box 3188
West Palm Beach, FL 33402-3188
Telephone: (561) 653-5000